13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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from 'the troubles' of the early nineteen-twenties. Souterrains have also been used for other illegal activities which were enjoyed irrespective of political party, such as the making of illicit whiskey—poteen—an activity which is not yet entirely suppressed and which called for secrecy. I have more than once been shown specially-made underground hiding-holes where the poteen-makers went to earth when the gaugers were scented.

In the category of temporary shelters we place the wretched 'fever-huts' erected to isolate victims of infectious diseases in the famine years. We cannot wonder that no detailed descriptions are to be found, but the account of a structure of 'turf built up in the form of a cone, with an entrance scarcely large enough for a dog to crawl through'[1] hints that some of these huts presented features of interest to the ethnographer. Temporary windbreaks erected by turf-cutters are also of considerable interest. One which I saw in Co. Fermanagh (Fig. 38)

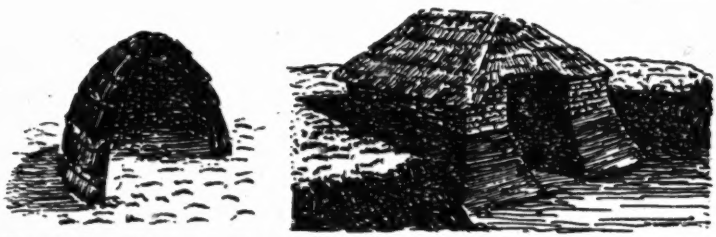

FIG. 38. Bog shelters, Co. Fermanagh. Left, for turf-cutters; right, partly dug out of the bog, for calves.

was built of birch rods bent over and neatly thatched with branches and rushes. The construction of animal shelters in great variety, too, built of sods or wattles, doubtless perpetuates skills once devoted to human habitations. I illustrate in Fig. 39 an outhouse with a solid hipped roof, known as a flat roof.

Unusual, because so far as I know confined to Achill Island, are little soot-houses erected for the special purpose of manufacturing supplies of soot and ashes as fertilizers. It is probable that we have to deal with a custom which has died out elsewhere and has maintained itself here in insular isolation. It will

[1] *The Saxon in Ireland* (1851), 148.

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343 387 be recalled that Achill was the last Irish home of booleying, and there may be some connection between the two practices, the soot-houses being the diminutive descendants of the winter dwellings whose roofs, on this theory, were stripped in spring in the days when the whole family migrated to the summer pastures. At any rate the soot-house season runs from October to May, that is the winter half-year. In the Hebrides it was customary to strip the soot-laden thatch of the black-houses annually for use as manure, and the roof was left without a smoke-hole to encourage the deposit of soot. The smoke 'oozes out over the whole roof, giving the house, when seen from a distance, the general appearance of a dung-heap in warm wet weather. The object of the roof is . . . to accumulate soot.'[1]

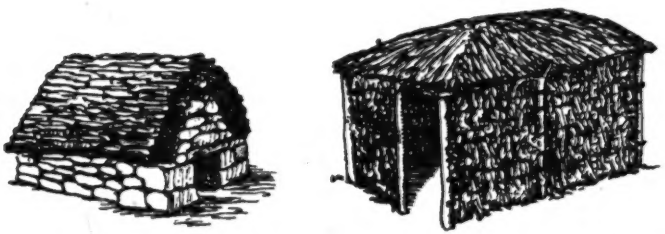

FIG. 39. Soot house, Achill Island; animal shelter with walls of whins and 'flat roof', Co. Cavan.

The soot-huts are rectangular gabled structures, measuring some ten by five feet externally and about eight feet high. They are built either out in the fields, where peat and sods are at hand, or near the farms, in which case they often serve in summer as hen-houses. The low side-walls are of dry-stone construction though when built in the fields they are more usually of sods: the entrance, in the gable, is only some two-and-a-half to three feet high. The roof structure is of the simplest, consisting of a ridge pole against which bits of driftwood serving as rafters rest without ties of any kind, the whole being kept in place by a great thickness of sods laid horizontally, the lowest layer resting on the thick wall-tops. At the end of harvest the huts

[1] A. Mitchell, *The Past in the Present* (1880), 53.

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are repaired and re-roofed with sods, and turf fires lit inside are kept smouldering with wet sods until the spring, when the huts are half-full of ashes and the soot-laden roof-sods are ready to collapse. The roof is then broken up and the soot and ashes spread on the ridges as potato manure (Fig. 39).

Although I know of no parallel in other parts of Ireland it seems likely that the custom of removing the roof-covering of the winter-house was once fairly general, at any rate in houses of the old Achill type, which in many details closely resembled the Hebridean black-house. I should be inclined to correlate the custom with the roped style of thatching, which betrays little of the care of other styles and in the old form where the ropes were weighted by hanging stones had a distinctly ephemeral appearance. Where sods were used for walls as well as roofs the whole house would have become a convenient source of fertilizers for the infield. This may be the explanation of the remark made by Dr. Madden that in the south of Ireland 'cottar houses of dirt, sticks and straw were generally removed once a year'.[1] There are indications met with in excavations of houses in Dark Age raths that reconstructions were more frequent than would be justified by ordinary wear and tear. In Sutherland, down to the early nineteenth century, sod-houses were abandoned periodically and pulled down to be utilized as manure, a new hut being erected near by. In this instance the cause was said to be that the accumulation of filth had rendered the place uninhabitable,[2] but this underestimates the tolerance of the Gael. The soot-houses, at any rate, seem to perpetuate old custom, and one thinks back to the earliest days of agriculture when crops were sown in the highly productive soils of newly burnt woodland. Faith in the use of fire persisted longer than the woods. Burning the land, we shall see in Chapter XI, was a very general practice down to the famine years when rough pasture was being reclaimed for potato-growing.

We come now to a group of stone structures built to serve as kilns for drying or burning. The drying-kilns were principally needed for drying corn before it was ground, though flax-drying kilns were also required in the days when the fibre was extracted

[1]Dr. Madden, *Reflections and Resolutions* (1738).
[2]Quoted in F. T. Smith, *The Land of Britain*, Part 3, Sutherland.

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County Antrim

PLATE II

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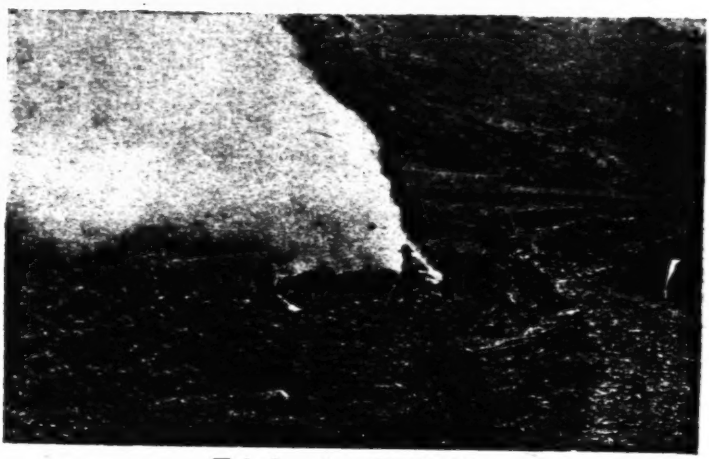
Kelp gatherers near Fair Head, Co. Antrim.



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Kelp-burning, Co. Antrim.

[facing p. 160]

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combined knife and drag found in Connacht has three heavy hooks attached to a strong sickle-shaped blade mounted on a 12-ft. pole (Fig. 73). Powerful long-handled scythes and great hand-rakes with teeth a foot long were used on the south coast. In Donegal the men would wield their long knives from curraghs while the women dragged the weed ashore.

In the Rosses of west Donegal around 1750 the rents were paid in kelp: any surplus was bartered for 'the two luxuries, spirits and tobacco, enjoyed by men and women alike.'[1] For the lesser weeds growing in shallow water ordinary sickles were employed when the tide was low, but these species made inferior kelp. Yet in some areas, for example Strangford Lough, stones were planted on the shore to grow wrack for kelp burning: Arthur Young commented on this practice in 1776.[2] Old seaweed beds may be seen also in Lough Swilly, Clew Bay, Achill Sound and probably elsewhere.

Today the most remarkable area of cultivated weed is near the mouth of Carlingford Lough in County Down, where at low tide a wide stretch of mud and sand is exposed in Mill Bay. It is grown solely to supply fertilizer for the potato crop. Wrack rights are mentioned in grants of land in County Down as far back as 1506, but the earliest reference I have found to the cultivated weed in Carlingford Lough is in a guidebook of 1846. As we have seen, however, Arthur Young refers to the growing of wrack for kelp-burning in Strangford Lough, and since the best species for kelp grow in deeper water the planting of seaweed beds is not likely to have originated with the kelp industry. Through the second half of last century some 1,100 beds, covering well over a square mile in area, were maintained in Mill Bay, and it was not until the depression between the two world wars that they began to be neglected. Today the use of wrack has almost entirely given way to artificial fertilizers, with a great easement of labour but a loss of annually renewed organic matter in the soil. The wrackbeds, or 'plans', are half-acre rectangles set with rows of boulders a foot or so in diameter, but many beds are subdivided into small 'cuts' for sub-letting, and the Estate Map showing the beds has the

[1] A. B., *The Rosses in 1753*, 201.
[2] A. Young, *Tour*, 1, 194.

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minutely fragmented appearance of land held in rundale. Rights of access, by narrow lanes between the beds, were often disputed, and there were occasions for fights when as many as a hundred carts from forty townlands might converge on Mill Bay at low tide. I first heard of the seaweed beds from an Air Force pilot who brought me air photographs of what he thought was submerged farmland: the little rectangular fields of Mourne seemed to march out beneath the sea.[1] In fact they were necessary adjuncts to the arable land, and the rents of up to twenty pounds an acre were often higher than those paid for the fields of coarse sand and gravel which the wrack enriched. An auctioneer told me he had sold a wrackbed of one Irish acre for £145 not many years ago. Nearly all of the several hundred farmers who had wrack rights here held two or three beds, and each man's plans were scattered so that he had different kinds of weed growing on them: 'knob wrack' close inshore, then 'bladder wrack' and farther out still the 'lazy wrack' whose fronds are submerged at high water even at neaps and which therefore grows faster than the other species.

The crop was harvested with knives and sickles between March and June, the bare-footed reapers at the same time lifting, turning and re-setting the heavy boulders which tend to get buried in the sand. Carts too are liable to sink, and when the going is too soft the weed is rafted ashore. It is allowed to float on the incoming tide and a boat dragging a rope pulls the load together and tows it ashore. Very large rafts, secured by a rope of seaweed, used to be floated ashore on the tide in Mayo. Patrick Knight, describing Ballycroy about 1830, observed that the steersman, armed with a pole, might be seen 'sitting on the heap, roasting his potatoes and shellfish'.[2]

The great bulk of the wrack taken all round the coast for manure was driftweed thrown up during storms, but the supply was often supplemented by cutting or pulling weed from the rocks, and in some places there were complicated methods of regulating and distributing the harvest. On a stretch of coast familiar to me in south Down one can pick out strips running out into the sea, demarcated by marked boulders. They were

[1] E. E. Evans, *Mourne Country*, ch. 15.
[2] P. Knight, *Erris in the Irish Highlands*, 99.